

Star Wars

Wizard's RPG Stories

source : <http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=starwars/newsarchive>
upload : 10.IV.2006

Droid Rights

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(as transcribed by Morrie Mullins from a short paper sent as a press release to every news agency and government office in the Cularin system)

San Herrera and Nia Reston, the young Force adepts who previously seemed obsessed with death and worked to provide "aid" to the Tarasin, have a new cause. They argue that droids have rights, just like everyone else, and should be respected -- and set free. Learn more in our latest supplement to the Living Force campaign, which ties in to "Uffel's Prisoners," the July scenario.

Thesis

We suggest that droids have rights, by virtue of being sentient beings. Too long have droids labored for those whose only claim to superiority is the ability to fit circuit boards together, weld a chassis, or install power cells. A droid, once completed, is a sentient being with goals and desires of its own, and should be treated as such. In this paper, we explore the notion that droids have historically been mistreated, that their basic rights as sentient beings have been perpetually subjugated by organic species, and that unless a paradigmatic shift occurs in how we consider droids, we will find ourselves in danger of violating the very will of the Force.

Argument

First, a note on language. In common usage, a "droid" is any mechanical construction that demonstrates some amount of decision-making capacity and which is created in order to serve the organic species of the galaxy. The term "droid" is, in our minds, derogatory and demeaning, as it reduces the variety of mechanical individuals who work throughout the galaxy into a single named class, without regard for the beauty and uniqueness each offers. Because of the offense we take at the labeling of these individuals as "droids," for the purposes of this paper we will refer to all such individuals as "synthetic people" or "synthetic persons." Thus, we recognize their inherent individuality while still acknowledging the general lack of carbon-based organic systems that most of our species share in common.

The plight of the synthetic person is one that begins far back in the annals of galactic history. The earliest records of synthetic people show that they were created as a servant class on worlds that believed themselves to be too refined to support slavery. Early synthetic people were little more than boxes designed to process information and provide feedback to their "masters" -- the title quickly adopted by those who either built or bought these synthetic people.

In less than a century, the first fully functional, free-range synthetic people began to be employed in various agricultural settings. The hottest deserts, the coldest poles, the most dangerous jungles -- organic individuals sent their synthetic people into these dangerous environments to do what the organics would not or could not do themselves. Many synthetic people perished, destroyed by the elements or ripped apart by predators. When this happened, their "masters" did not mourn their loss, but simply went out and bought more.

Over the course of countless years, the systematic abuse of synthetic people has become common practice. These individuals provide significant inputs to the functioning of the galaxy on almost every level, but are not afforded the same basic freedoms the organic citizens of the galaxy enjoy. They are, in a word, slaves, and in a galaxy where slavery is outlawed in all but the most outlying, lawless systems, this smacks of the highest form of hypocrisy. We believe ourselves to be "better" than slavers, to be more concerned about the fundamental rights of individuals, but we are so indolent, so pampered, that we still cannot do the work ourselves. So we create machines with the capacity to think and set them to the tasks we do not wish to do, never considering that when these machines gained the capacity to reason, they also gained the capacity to hurt.

We spoke once with a synthetic person who was serving as a "protocol droid" on Coruscant. (We find it ironic that we even have synthetic people for protocol. Is there anything the synthetic person is not expected to do? Must we really create a class of synthetic people whose purpose is to make sure that we eat with the right fork and bow appropriately when meeting dignitaries from other planets?) This synthetic person's actual assignment was watching a trio of rambunctious children who seemed to delight in abusing their metallic companion. After a particularly unpleasant-looking tumble down a set of stairs, the synthetic person picked himself up and began making minor repairs to his torso. Every few seconds, he made a small adjustment, and then twitched. His eyes blinked green, then gold, then green again, and he sighed.

We spoke with the synthetic person (his designation is not included herein, for fear that his masters might erase his memory? or worse), and he informed us that this was, in fact, a standard day on the job. When asked if it hurt to fall down the stairs, he seemed genuinely surprised by the question. "Comfort," he told us, "is not an issue. I am uncomfortable, but it allows me to look forward to a hot oil-bath in the evening, after my wonderful charges have been put to bed. This is what I do. I fall down stairs, and I allow myself to be kicked, hit, beaten upon with hammers, partially dismantled, and subjected to various other indignities. I do this so that my master does not have to suffer in these same situations. It is much better that I do so, because if I have an unpleasant experience, I can have it erased from my memory, while my master would have to live with that experience for all time. As such, one might say that droids are made to suffer -- it's our lot in life."

It is clear, even from this brief conversation, that synthetic people do hurt, that they do experience discomfort, and that they recognize that this discomfort falls to them because they are less important than their masters. They are created to endure the things that organics cannot or would prefer not to endure. They recognize their status as servants and, because of their programming, feel powerless to change it. So their solution to their pain is

to erase their own memories - - to destroy the continuity of their lives. It is more important to serve the master than to have their own identities. This is what they have been taught, or at least programmed to believe.

This pattern is so ingrained today that war rages in the galaxy with one side of the battlefield made up largely of synthetic people. Ironically, the opposing force is largely an organic form of the synthetic person, a mass-produced "clone" army that was created for the sole purpose of waging war. The argument could be made that the current war actually pits one form of synthetic person against another, with relatively few free-willed organics risking their lives (aside from the Jedi, of course). While this might be overstating the case slightly, we suggest that it is reflective of the larger galactic problem of failing to recognize the rights of every sentient creature to exist in the way that it finds the most meaningful and fulfilling.

As things stand, we are no better than Hutts. We start wars, but we do not fight wars. We order synthetic people to do all our dangerous work, and then we sit back and watch. If they succeed, we prosper. If they fail, we purchase more synthetic people. If we win a war fought by synthetic people, what have we really won? This question in its basic form doesn't change whether we consider "droids," "clones," or both to be synthetic people. No matter which side prevails, the war will have been won by armies lacking free will, which we suggest creates a dangerous precedent. If soldiers can fight without free will, without any control over their own life-or-death struggle, what does this mean for the rest of the galaxy? What does this mean for the common person on Cularin, Coruscant, or anywhere else?

These questions are, in some respects, metapolitical. We would like to close with a set of recommendations and a call for a more in-depth understanding of how a lack of compliance with these recommendations may cause us to diverge from the will of the Force.

Recommendation 1: All synthetic people shall immediately be freed, and any claim of "ownership" denounced by those who currently call themselves "master." To do less than this is to violate the basic premise that all sentient beings are part of the vast, interrelated whole that is the Force.

Recommendation 2: Ownership of synthetic people shall be outlawed in any star system that claims loyalty to the Republic and which remains bound by the decisions of the Galactic Senate. Any individual who wishes to employ a synthetic person should pay that synthetic person at a rate equivalent to that of an organic worker with the same knowledge and skill set. Again, because of the interrelatedness of all things, this is the only way to adhere to the precepts of the light side of the Force.

Recommendation 3: Any situation deemed too dangerous for an organic creature shall likewise be viewed as too dangerous for a synthetic person, and thus avoided. Any synthetic person who agrees to engage in particularly dangerous activities should receive hazard pay. We recommend that such pay be at least twice that individual's standard wages.

Recommendation 4: Memory wipes without the express written consent of a synthetic person shall be made illegal and shall be punishable as if the individual performing the wipe had just performed involuntary neurosurgery on a self-aware organic individual. Our past is all that we are, and to violate

that is to remove some portion of an individual's essential connection to the Force.

Conclusion

There are many perspectives on the nature of "life," some of which are implicit in our arguments. We accept that some in the galaxy will not agree with our assumptions or our assessment of the situation. However, we can no longer stand idly by while an entire class of sentient beings is systematically enslaved by a society that professes to be above slavery.

If we are truly above slavery, then we have only one choice: We must recognize the rights of synthetic people, and free them. Free them now!